

Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth

and

Allensworth, California

The following report was written mainly as a source of information for the Ranger at the Allensworth Unit. Information in this report was ^{compiled} by interviewing former residents of the town and going through the little written material on the town and Colonel Allen Allensworth. Much of the information gathered covered home locations and other features of the town's physical make-up. Gathering this type of information is a very slow adventure. The time spent and information gathered on the town's physical make-up will not be reflected in this report.

However from this report I feel you as a reader will be brought closer to the town of Allensworth, California, it's residents and the problems both experienced. As a reader you must keep in mind the time period in America's history which the town lived, (1908-1914).

This report is far from having all of the information on the town or the Colonel. Approximately two hundred and twelve (212) hours went into this report. It was also done under ample limitations.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALLEN ALLENSWORTH

by

Alfred Griffin, Jr., SPR I

1975

Mr. Allen Allensworth was born in Louisville, Kentucky, on April 7, 1842. His parents were Phyllis and Levi Allensworth. They named Allen Allensworth after Bishop Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both parents were slaves, thus making Allen a born slave. Mrs. Phyllis Allensworth gave young Allen to her Master's son, Thomas Starbird, as a personal slave. Mrs. Allensworth had thirteen children in all. With young Allen being the only one of the thirteen who hadn't been sold down the river.

Allen was instructed to play school with Tommy Starbird. Thus Allen was able to learn to read and write. With reading and writing came trouble. The Master learned that Allen could read and write and he was sold down the river. For it was against the law for a slave to read and write. He had also acquired a Webster's Spelling Book to assist him in his learning. This book was considered as the bases of all learning, by the slaves.

He was sold to Jim Ficklin, and he escaped. When he was discovered he was sold to a slave dealer in Kentucky, for \$960.00. The slave dealer placed him in a slave pen with many other slaves. This being something Allen was not accustomed to. The selling price was \$1200.00. However no one purchased him so into another pen he went, in New Orleans. Soon Fred Scruggs purchased him for a race-horse rider.

When Scruggs took Allen to Louisville for an up coming race Allen escaped to the Union Lines. This proved to be his first break away from slavery. In doing so he worked as a medical helper with the 44 th Illinois.

Allen didn't get on free soil until 1862, December. He was in Georgetown, Ohio. He received his first job as a free man, with pay in 1863 when he joined the Navy. His time was served on board the Queen City. He received an honorable discharge on April 4, 1865.

Once out he and a brother opened two restaurants in Saint Louis. However this was a shortly lived dream. For they sold out and Allen returned to Louisville. While there he worked with the iron firm of W.B. Belknap & Company. Then he joined the Fifth Street Baptist Church. Where he improved his education and began his ministry.

On April 9, 1871, he was ordained as a Christian Minister. After which he returned to school. He also pastored at several churches. While at most of these churches, he built the congregation tremendously.

September 20, 1877, he married Josephine Leavell. They had met Roger Williams University. There she studied music. She was of German descent. Mrs. Allensworth was fifteen (15) years younger than her husband. She lived until March 27, 1939. Mrs. Allensworth gave birth to three children, one boy and two girls. However only the two girls lived, (I have been unable to determine the cause

of death for the only boy). The girls were very successful in live. As a child their social life was limited. This was due to their father's position in the military. In the military it is an unwritten law that commissioned officers and their families have little or nothing to do with enlisted personnel. Thus during that time in our nation's history Whites refused to have anything to do with Blacks. Therefore making it hard on Colonel Allensworth and his family.

in 1884 Mr. Allensworth was elected by the Third Congressional District as its representative at the National Conception in Chicago. He also maintained a membership in the Odd Fellows and the Masons.

After four years of letter writing Allensworth entered the Army in 1886, as a captain and chaplain. He was in command of the twenty-fourth infantry. Some of the twenty-fourth's duty stations were:

Fort Supply, Indian Territory

World's Columbian Exposition, Jackson Park, Chicago

Fort Douglas, Salt Lake City

New Mexico

Spanish American War 1898

Fort Huachuca, Arizona 1896

Battle of San Juan Hill

Philippine Insurrection 1899

Presidio in San Francisco

Records indicate that the Colonel had perfect respect and control of his men at all times.

Colonel Allensworth was a educator in many of the places he traveled. He established a grade system in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and a school system in New Mexico, Allensworth, and the Philippines.

Officer Allensworth had his leg broken by a horse and buggy, in 1900. Thus he was given an absence of leave in 1901. Upon retirement he was honored with the rank of Army Lieutenant-Colonel Retired. Thus making him the first Black man in the nation to achieve so high a rank.

Once again in 1914 the streets proved to be unsafe for Mr. Allen Allensworth, for he was struck down by a motorcycle in Monrovia, California. However this was not before he founded the town of Allensworth in Tulare County, California, 1908.

The Town of Allensworth, California

by

Alfred Griffin, Jr., SPR I

1975

There are only a few scattered houses in the nearly ghost town of Allensworth. The person responsible for the town's placement on the map was Lieutenant Colonel Allensworth. His home is still standing, research has proved that the house has been modified since the Colonel's departure. In an interview with Mrs. Gomez, (a former resident of the town, she came to the town in 1911), she recalls the Colonels house being a two story house. She also speaks of the Colonel as a gentle person. She remembers that on different occasions he would come to the school and talk to the class. Mrs. Gomez states that during the days of the Colonel the town was a busy one. It had it's own government and supporting businesses.

When I questioned Mrs. Gomez, now seventy (70) years old, about the things the children would do for recreation. Her reply was sing, take walks and have picnics. She appeared to be very proud of her life in Allensworth. The people were very helpful and kind to each other she recalls. She explains, if you needed something from outside of town and someone was going out of town you simply made a list and they would bring it back for you. Interesting to note this practice still is going on in the ghostly town today. I choose to determine why the Colonel wanted to build the town. So I had the pleasure of speaking with Mrs. Broiles, who came to the town in 1909 and her husband soldiered with the Colonel. She relayed

to me that he addressed himself to attracting retired veterans and their families. He wanted a town for Blacks where they could be productive and free of large influence by whites.

Allensworth, Professor W.A Payne, former principal of Grant County School in West Virginia, Dr. Peck of Los Angeles, J.W. Palmer, a Nevada miner, and Harvey Mitchell, a real estate man, joined together to form the California Colony and Home Promotion Association. On August 3, 1908, the township site plan was filed in Los Angeles County. The association originally purchased twenty (20) acres of land in Tulare County, midway between Corcoran and Wasco. It soon comprised eighty (80) acres. The town expanded on both sides of Highway # 43. Individuals, several of the association members purchased land and divided it up into smaller lots and sold it.

Most of the one hundred (100) original settlers came from Oklahoma, Mississippi and Kentucky, the Colonel's home town. They were aggressive, hard working and hungry people for freedom and peace. However, others were very well equipped to fill the rolls as leaders.

As told to me by several of the interviewees, Mr. Payne was the first teacher-principal of the town. Also Mr. Over, one of the persons who originally surveyed the land, was the justice of the peace, and the first black person in California to hold that position. There was also George

Johnson, a carpenter who built the school, Mr. Hinsman, a graduate of the National Cooperative Realty Co., who owned a general store, and who was appointed notary public for Tulare County by Governor Hiram Johnson. His wife was the town's librarian. None of the original settlers, or their descendants live in the town today. The great depression forced most of the townsfolk out. The present population is approximately half Black and half Mexican-American.

Sources have it that by 1914 two hundred (200) Negroes were living in the town with a average capital worth of \$682.25. More than nine hundred (900) acres of land deeded to ^{the} residents with an valuation of \$112,500, this excluded land not deeded, townsite properties, buildings and improvements worth another \$20,000, overall it would be fair to say the town was ^{very} successful in its operation. In my interviews I also learned that the government was controlled by the Allensworth Board of Trade, which recommended people for office, and dealt with town improvements. Also there was a post office operated by Mr. Singleton for about four years, a hotel, managed by John Morris, telegraph and grain warehouse. The barber shop was operated by Frank Milmer. Other businesses included a laundry (dunlap), railroad station, drugstore (Mrs. Grosse), and ice house.

The women's Improvement Club, Girl's Glee Club, and the Singleton Orchestra (brass band) would provide various forms of entertainment for the towns people. There also was a annual picnic, where-by all the "Town's Folk" would bring food and everyone would have a feast.

I questioned Mrs. Gomez on the town's water supply, she then pulled from a stack of pictures a picture showing a artesian well. All the water was supplied by three artesian wells. The water pumped by the wells was stored in three resevoirs after a mjaor flood the banks broke lose on the resevoirs. Thus, the community found a new source for water. By establishing a electric water pump to the rear of Mrs. Mackey's home. Mrs. Mackey served as the collector of pay for the water company. Thus the community was able to receive water through pipe system. It is interesting to note that like ^{some} of the other things accomplished in the community, the laying of the pipe system from which each member receives water was a community effort. Once again a fine display of the unity within ^{the} community. Much of this same unity still exist in the ghostly town today. By th way the first laying of the water mains was 1912. There were limitations placed on the water main system, (it was refinded to those within the immediate viciniy of the town, Palmer to Sotourna). Amazing how close the past and the present are. For there are still limitations on the water company. The main

limitation being on the amount of water a member may use. Land irrigation is almost forbidden.

Mrs. Gomez who was a young child during the days of the Colonel, recollects starting school in a little house. After an inspection of the maps we found this to be the Hackett house. She further stated that after about a year they moved into a little one-room school, (located north of the present school). Thus converting the Hackett house into a library. In 1914 the large school was completed and the thirty (30) children moved into it. This was a very remarkable day for Mrs. Gomez. For as she reminisces she explains that they (children) all came to school one day and they along with their instructor, Professor Payne, picked up their books and papers and walked over to the new school. Little did they know that only twenty (20) years later this same operation would be repeated. Once again the ^{abandoned} school was used for a library. As one would expect in a town of it's size, the school was and still is used for all community happenings. The Methodist services were held in the school. Sources have it that the first graduation ceremony was in 1917, with six pupils graduating.

Let me point out right here that the Allensworth library was apart of the Tulare County Free Library, it closed down in 1943. It was named ^{Mary} Dickinson Memorial Library (after Mrs. Allensworth's mother). The library became a

first by using The University of California's extension library program. Majority of the books dealt with government or some form of colony living.

Through research it was learned that Professor Payne, (first instructor-principal of Allensworth), brought the first waves of resentment from the white population to Allensworth. He became a advocate for the building of a black student college, of which would be located in Allensworth. He debated his idea through states. It finally got to the point that Assemblyman Fres Scott wrote a bill supporting the idea. However we must understand that Scott, (a white man), like Tulare and Fresno Counties was advocating segregation. There by advocating segregation the idea and plan which Professor Payne had were undermined and distorted. This caused other Blacks to rebel against Payne's idea of a Black Student College. Because as it took the form of segregation Blacks saw it as, seperate meant unequal, and there were those that believed white was best. Also many of them had been slaves, and had experienced segregation.

Professor Payne continued to debate in support of his idea. However only to gain more opposition from the other influential Blacks. Several religious leaders came together in Los Angeles and spoke out against the Black College idea. This was a public gathering. From the meeting, pressure was placed on Governor Hiram Johnson, opposing

the establishing of the school. As I see it it would have been disasterious for Governor Hiram Johnson not to oppose the school. Look at it like this, with approximately seventy thousand (70,000) Blacks in California, of which approximately sixty thousand (60,000) lived in the Los Angeles area. Thus their opinions and view points carried a lot of weight in government. The real threat to the government was the fact that Blacks were united.

This episode of Professor Payne's marked the first stage of continued problems for the town. Even as we look at the community today there is still evidence of continued problems (from outside the town). One of the major efforts to distroy the unity in the town was introduced when the town had financial difficulty. Help was asked of the Pacific Farming Company of Los Angeles. The company attempt to set themselves up as a land agent. Also when they filed (1909) to incooperate the water company they were unable to pay the required taxes. Thus in 1913 the Articles of incorporation were suspended. Therefore Pacific Farming Company took advantage of the situation. All monies owed were paid and the Pacific Company took control of the water company. Immediately they issued a statement that no more land could be sold to Black's in Allensworth. After a tough, and historical battle the township forced, (through legal channels), Pacific Farming Company to return it's stock in the water company and depart the town.

It was interesting to learn that shortly after the Pacific Farming Company was forced to leave ^{town} the water supply began to disappear. Irrigation ditches and dykes siphoned off the town's necessary water. The three artesian wells went dry. Thus with the lack of irrigation came alkali to the surface. Shortly there after, test proved that a high level of arsenic existed in the remaining water. Unfortunately very little of the above situation has changed. For the water is still a major issue in the town.

It is brought to my attention by a interviewee that a newspaper existed in Allensworth, The Sentiment-Maker. Through this paper attempts were made to improve the white folk's sentiments toward Blacks. Mrs. Gomez informed me that she recalls reading the newspaper as part of her required school assignment. Also members of the all Black military companies read the Sentiment often. For it offered them a place to live free of white influence. This is how the Colonel first attempted to recruit or influence people into coming to the town of Allensworth. One source of information has it that the Colonel only tried to establish a retirement town for the Homecoming soliders. However we must keep in mind that the majority of the residents were from the south, and not the military. Another factor which contributed to the towns down fall

was World War II. For it drained the town of it's young men. With many of the remaining residents departing to larger towns, to work in the factories.

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Tulare County Tax Office

Tulare County Planning Office

Interviews;

. Mrs. Gomez, for resident, Tulare, California

Mrs. Broiles, former resident, Portersville, California

Mrs. Smith, granddaughter of Allensworth, Los Angeles, California

Mr. Jones, resident of Allensworth, California

Mrs. Mackey, former resident of Allensworth, California, Tulare, California

Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Cotton, former residents of Allensworth, California, Lathrop, California.

Mr. Ed Pope, former resident of Allensworth, California, Sacramento, California

Los Angeles California Eagle

The Sentiment-Maker, May 15, 1912

The Tulare Register, 1908